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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Political Office in Bougainville

Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the letter dated 19 December 2002 from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General, in which the Council, inter alia, endorsed a final extension, until 31 December 2003, of the mandate of the United Nations Political Office in Bougainville (UNPOB), and requested the Secretariat to produce a written report on the progress of the UNPOB mission, including a clear exit strategy for the completion of the mission and withdrawal, with a timetable and benchmarks that incorporate the holding of elections; the report was also to provide details on what specific steps UNPOB intended to take to meet each objective in its exit strategy on time. The present report reviews the activities of UNPOB since the last briefing in the Council on 21 November 2002, the remaining challenges and benchmarks to be achieved by the parties to the Bougainville Peace Agreement, and the exit strategy of the Office.

Weapons collection

2. At the last briefing, on 21 November 2002, the Security Council was informed that Bougainville ex-combatants had committed themselves to completing stage II of the weapons disposal plan by 24 December 2002. It did not prove possible, however, to achieve the goal by that date. With the start of the new year, efforts have been intensified to complete this stage. At a specially convened meeting of political and former combatant leaders held in Buka on 17 February 2003, an Action Plan for the Completion of Weapons Collection was adopted. The Plan focuses on the specific challenges to weapons collection in each district, identifies the actions that need to be taken to overcome them and the individuals who should be made responsible for taking those actions, and sets target dates for their completion; and makes a determination whether an involvement at the political level is required to address any outstanding issues.

3. At the end of February 2003, 80.2 per cent of Bougainville had reached stage II, and two districts had fully completed the process of disarmament. Of the total number of collected weapons, 7.4 per cent have been destroyed in advance of the formal launch of stage III. Since the implementation of the Action Plan started, the

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parties have re-contained one trunk of weapons of the Bougainville Resistance Force (about 95 stolen weapons remain to be re-contained), held one stage I containment ceremony and scheduled more stage II containment ceremonies across the island.

4. The Bougainville Resistance Force (BRF) and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) have each scheduled their own separate meetings around the end of March 2003 to discuss the issue of the final fate of the collected weapons. Following the adoption of their respective positions they will meet together to reach a unified position on the matter.

5. A major obstacle to the achievement of reasonably complete weapons disposal in Bougainville is the non-involvement of Mr. Francis Ona and his Me'ekamui Defence Force (MDF) in the peace process. The Bougainville parties believe that ex-combatants associated with MDF have played a role in the de-containment of collected weapons. MDF seems to be intent on acquiring weapons, either by purchasing them from other military factions or by other means. At the same time, persons claiming Me'ekamui affiliation have been spreading disinformation about the Peace Monitoring Group, UNPOB, and the whole peace process.

6. The parties to the Bougainville Peace Agreement are engaged in trying to secure Francis Ona's participation in the peace process. Appeals to this end have been made at various times by the Minister for Inter-Government Relations with responsibility for Bougainville, Sir Peter Barter; the Governor of the Province, John Momis; the President of the Bougainville People's Congress, Mr. Joseph Kabui; and other political leaders as well as UNPOB. The aim of this campaign is to receive from Mr. Francis Ona a clear commitment to refrain from any actions or policies that could have the effect of disturbing or impeding the implementation of the Peace Agreement, especially in weapons disposal. Unfortunately, Mr. Francis Ona remains non-committal. In this context, UNPOB deeply regrets the death of one MDF combatant in a recent shoot-out outside Arawa township. UNPOB will work with others concerned to ensure that this unfortunate incident has no impact on the peace process.

7. UNPOB is seeking to identify ways of facilitating and expediting the completion of weapons collection at stage II in the shortest possible time. Accordingly, UNPOB will continue, with valuable support from the Peace Monitoring Group, to monitor the fulfilment of the commitments assumed in the Action Plan. In this context, and as part of its regular use of Radio Bougainville, UNPOB is arranging a round-table discussion on the progress of the peace process. This will involve the participation of the Governor and other political and military leaders. These discussions will focus on the importance and urgency of weapons collection and the certification of the completion of stage II containment which UNPOB will be required to make to clear the way for the entry into force of the constitutional amendments.

Constitutional aspect of the peace process

8. The development of the new Bougainville Constitution is a central part of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. The work of the Bougainville Constitutional Commission has been progressing well. After its establishment in September 2002, this body began a process of consulting the people, developing recommendations and considering successive versions of the draft of the

Constitution. An official first draft was released on 1 February 2003 for island-wide consultations. On the basis of the feedback, a second draft has been prepared and will soon be made available for consideration by the Bougainvilleans living on the island and offshore. It will also be examined by the Joint Assembly of the Bougainville Interim Provincial Government and the Bougainville People's Congress.

9. Following a review by a bipartisan Ministerial Committee and the National Executive Council of the Government of Papua New Guinea, the draft will be returned to the Bougainville Constitutional Commission for its consideration. Provided the Commission is able to complete the required internal consultations, the draft Constitution could be finalized by the end of April 2003 and submitted for adoption by a Constituent Assembly of Bougainville. The Constituent Assembly cannot be established, however, until the completion of stage II of weapons disposal has been verified. Assuming that the required certification can be made by UNPOB by the time the work on the Constitution is complete, the Bougainville Constitutional Commission expects that elections could be held before the end of 2003.

The role of the national government

10. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, the Government of Papua New Guinea has demonstrated its commitment to implementing the Bougainville Peace Agreement. The Minister for Inter-Government Relations with responsibility for Bougainville, together with other cabinet members, pays regular visits to the island to assess the situation, and to develop personal relations with Bougainville leaders and former combatants, so as to contribute to an expeditious resolution of the remaining challenges to the peace process. As a result of their visit on 18 and 19 February 2003, the National Government and the Bougainville parties signed a memorandum of understanding that established a mechanism for consultation between them on all aspects of the implementation of the autonomy arrangements, including the transfer of powers, functions and resources, and the settlement of disputes.

11. The establishment of this mechanism, ahead of the required time, is an indication of the confidence the two sides have in each other and of their mutual commitment to the Peace Agreement, in particular to the conclusion of stage II of the weapons disposal plan. The decision by the National Government to withdraw its Defence Force from the island on 26 March 2003 is another indication of that confidence.

Contribution of the Peace Monitoring Group and the donor community

12. At the beginning of 2003, the Peace Monitoring Group informed the parties to the Peace Agreement of its intention to cease all operations on the island on 30 June 2003, and to withdraw thereafter. During its deployment, the Peace Monitoring Group has provided a valuable contribution to the peace process including, among other things, transportation by helicopter of former combatants to meetings, logistical support to weapons collection and meetings of the Peace Process

Consultative Committee, collection of information in regard to developments in the interior of the island, facilitation of communication between UNPOB and former combatants, and provision of peace-related information to the island's population.

13. Regional donors, especially Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, have given valuable and sustained support to the Bougainville peace process. Their contributions have facilitated almost all of the meetings held in connection with weapons disposal, and they have renewed their commitment to continue to help with not only the implementation of the Action Plan for the Completion of Weapons Collection but also the holding of the stage III consultations, and to provide input to community development projects.

14. UNPOB is striving to ensure that, by the time the Peace Monitoring Group withdraws, weapons disposal will be so far advanced that it will no longer need this level of Monitoring Group support. At this time, however, it seems unlikely that the process will be completed by 30 June. Therefore, UNPOB is of the view that, prior to the withdrawal of the Monitoring Group, it would be helpful if the parties to the Agreement reviewed the progress of weapons disposal and, if necessary, considered replacing the Peace Monitoring Group with an alternative arrangement to assist UNPOB to fulfil its mandate and start withdrawing by the end of 2003. It should be pointed out that no provision for additional resources has been made for UNPOB to take on the logistical and other support currently provided by the Peace Monitoring Group.

Objectives of the mandate

15. The ultimate objective of the UNPOB mandate is to verify that at stage II of the weapons disposal plan the collected weapons have been placed in secure, double-locked containers under its supervision. Together with the resolution by the parties of the issue of Mr. Francis Ona, agreement on the final fate of the weapons and the creation among Bougainvilleans of a feeling of security, verification by UNPOB will trigger the entry into force of the constitutional amendments. Those amendments will open the way for the election of an autonomous Bougainville government, expected to be held before the end of 2003. With the establishment of the first autonomous government, the mandate of UNPOB will be fulfilled and the Office closed.

16. As the end of the United Nations political mandate in Bougainville approaches, UNPOB is looking to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations agencies to take the lead in promoting activities on the island that could facilitate the reintegration and rehabilitation of former combatants and, more generally, the restoration of community services and infrastructure. The predecessor of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, the Lincoln Agreement, did call for rehabilitation and reintegration, but this aspect has not kept pace with weapons disposal. It was never built into the Peace Agreement as a strategy to accompany weapons disposal. In this context, the UNDP cocoa project should be commended for its success in offering employment to many Bougainvilleans, including ex-combatants. The UNDP programme in Bougainville is in a transition phase, and UNPOB is holding consultations with UNDP aimed at ensuring that its valuable contribution to post-conflict peace-building, including the improvement of governance on the island, is sustained.

Observations

17. Bougainville is a small but very complex society with a great diversity of clans, sub-clans and language groups. The divisions, suspicions and mistrust created by the war have only served to compound that complexity. Given also the extremely low level of the island's development, it is not difficult to understand the slow pace of change in the society. Yet there has been change. In accordance with the Lincoln Agreement, the former warring factions have chosen to resolve their differences peacefully. With the help of the Office's bridge-building, brokering and facilitating role, they have significantly advanced the process of change that has been under way since that Agreement was signed. Their leaders have a unity of purpose and action, although that has not yet permeated the whole society, which still bears the deep scars of war. The peace process is undoubtedly stronger than it has ever been before, but it still needs nurturing. In order to solidify peace in Bougainville, I would wish to appeal to the donor community to continue its valuable assistance to the island following the expected departure of the Office at the end of 2003.

18. I would also wish to pay tribute to the sterling efforts of my Representative, Noel Sinclair, and his small team — all of whom are working with great dedication, in testing conditions, to help consolidate peace and stability in Bougainville.